



AppalachianVoices

**2024 PRIORITIES**

## UNLOCKING SUPPORT FOR APPALACHIA

In 2023, we saw immense traction deploying solar for local communities and businesses, adding more local solar jobs and building community energy and environmental resilience. We deployed funds from the Appalachian Solar Finance Fund, which has now supported 47 new solar projects and deployed 6.4 megawatts of solar energy in Appalachia, and supported the second cohort of solar installation apprentices to add local jobs installing cost-saving solar for businesses and community organizations across the region. We have continued to expand the impact of our work, securing new federal funding in 2023 to advance renewable energy and build more community

and climate resiliency. This will help communities plan electrification and other building upgrades for a shift to clean energy that can serve the community, including during critical times like flooding or other disasters.

Following years of work by Appalachian Voices and our partners, we were able to celebrate the development of a new recreation area in Dante, Virginia. With the support of federal, regional, local, and private funds, we closed mine portals and created a new campground, trail system, and recreation area that will spur economic growth while preserving the environment.



### Top Priorities for 2024:

- Work on both sides of the aisle at the state and federal levels to bring transformative investments in clean energy and a healthy environment for our communities, and ensure the concerns of local leaders are heard
- Build upon our community and climate resilience projects that restore ecosystems and strengthen local economies, and replicate this success across the region
- Make sure communities have direct engagement in developing meaningful plans to reap the benefits of federal investments

## TRANSITIONING UTILITIES TO CLEAN ENERGY

Last year, we secured historic progress deploying federal investments in clean energy and ensuring communities and rural electricity providers can access these opportunities to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels.

Unfortunately, monopoly utilities still plan to expand the region's dependence on fossil fuels, with plans to invest billions of dollars in fossil fuel infrastructure at their ratepayers' expense. As we work to expand access to renewable energy — like solar — for their customers, we must simultaneously combat misinformation campaigns that are sowing doubt about the benefits of renewables.

In Virginia, we secured passage of two pieces of important legislation that expand shared solar and prevent utility shut-offs during extreme weather and public health emergencies. Appalachian Voices worked for years to pass these bills — which await the governor's signature. In North Carolina, we are formally intervening in the state Carbon Plan process to help counter Duke Energy's efforts to expand reliance on gas. In Tennessee, the publicly owned Tennessee Valley Authority gives the public little say in the utility's long-term plans. We worked with bipartisan federal legislators to introduce reform legislation that would hold the TVA accountable to the public and its customers.



Photo: John Todd Waterman

### Top Priorities for 2024:

- Work with rural and local electric cooperatives to bring on more solar energy, reducing electricity costs and reliance on fossil fuels for their ratepayers
- Fight solar misinformation campaigns through investments in public awareness educational opportunities for ratepayers and co-op members
- With an infusion of new federal dollars, ensure state energy programs effectively advance clean energy in the communities with the greatest needs
- Hold big utilities accountable through legislative and regulatory processes

## FIGHTING FOSSIL FUEL EXPANSION

Across Appalachia, industry has proposed a massive fossil fuel expansion with 13 gigawatts of new gas power planned in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. This could lock us into decades of reliance on polluting fossil fuels and irreversible climate impacts. We remain steadfast in our opposition to gas projects, including the Mountain Valley Pipeline and its Southgate extension. We continue to support communities along their routes, demanding regulators hear what we and our coalition partners have said all along: These projects were never needed.

Tennessee and North Carolina face the two largest proposed methane gas expansions in the United States. These proposals include new gas pipelines and new gas plants. We are on the ground along the proposed routes of these pipelines, assisting residents who face loss of their land through eminent domain and who risk seeing pipelines cut across their communities. In collaboration with local partners, we are opposing projects in both states through public campaigns and the courts. We will not stop exposing these projects for what they truly are: unnecessary, unsafe, and unwanted.

### Top Priorities for 2024:

- Defeat massive fossil fuel infrastructure buildouts in Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia
- Continue working with partners and directly affected communities to ensure the voices of those most impacted by these projects are amplified and centered
- Demonstrate the widespread public opposition to increased fossil fuel buildout
- Hold the Mountain Valley Pipeline and MVP Southgate projects accountable and intervene at every stage of their unnecessary development



## ADDRESSING COAL'S DEVASTATING IMPACTS

Appalachian Voices continues to fight for communities impacted by the coal industry. We launched a program with partners across the region to monitor air pollutants that directly impact public health. Our work on the federal level helped lead the Environmental Protection Agency to strengthen air pollution rules for particulate matter for the first time in over 10 years. We successfully advocated for a rule to protect coal miners from exposure to silica dust, which is 20 times more toxic than coal dust and a leading cause of black lung disease.

We secured a federal investigation into "zombie mines" — mines that have not produced coal in months or years and have not been reclaimed. Also, we were instrumental in the release of a new policy platform — endorsed by over 50 organizations — that outlines what Congress can do to stop this new wave of abandoned mines. In October 2023, Appalachian Voices met with senior leaders from the U.S. Department of the Interior in Southwest Virginia to discuss mine reclamation, as it remains vital for us to continue bringing on-the-ground issues to the highest levels of our government.

### Top Priorities for 2024:

- Reform federal laws and improve enforcement of existing laws to ensure coal companies clean up mined land
- Continue to improve resources and benefits for miners suffering from black lung disease and their families
- Monitor new mines and help communities directly impacted by coal operations to document and share public health and pollution concerns



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